

To the members of the GAE Committee:  
Hearing 3/7/11 SB 148

My name is Linda Dente and I am here today to speak in opposition to SB 148, a bill to eliminate the 1% requirement for the purchase of art for state buildings. I am currently an independent public art consultant but I managed the State of Connecticut's Public Art program for some 20 years before leaving state service in 2005.

I began working for the CT Commission on the Arts (now the Commission on Culture and Tourism) in 1978, the same year the Public Art law was enacted. Connecticut was among the first states nationally to adopt this model legislation and quickly took on a leadership role in the field. Some 30 states soon followed.

The Public Art movement had democracy as its core principle. It sought to create art that was free and non-exclusive and reached the hearts and minds of people where they lived, worked and played. No museum entry fee required. Among the first projects to benefit from this law was this very building, the people's building, where the eagle soars in the atrium lobby and every hearing room door highlights Connecticut history with hand crafted inlaid imagery.

For those of you who may be of my generation you might also remember that 1978 was not a great year for the US economy either. Although we did not suffer from the crushing deficits we now face in our state, unemployment was high and job creation was at the top of our agenda, especially where artists were concerned.

What I began to realize over the years, however, was that 1 % for art was a powerful economic stimulus as well, extending far beyond the artist to small business owners like welders, printers, graphic designers, electricians, fabricators, trucking firms and riggers. Artists purchase materials and insurance, they hire assistants and rent studio and warehouse space. Just imagine, the hiring of ONE artist for ONE percent of a building budget can do ALL this. Now, that's a great investment!

I hope you would agree that the elimination of this program runs counter to the states interest in stimulating the economy and getting our citizens working again.

Another important point to make is that this Public Art investment dovetails so beautifully with Connecticut's educational infrastructure goals. The vast majority of building projects in the state during my tenure have been technical high schools, community colleges and state universities where art adds so much value to the educational experience, challenging imaginations and enlivening the minds of our future generation of scientists, engineers, teachers, artists and entrepreneurs.

It would be such a blow to the State's reputation and economy to strike down this law after 33 successful years of cultivating our creative capitol.

I'd like to conclude by saying that the State's cultural development and its economic development are not mutually exclusive. Flowers and corn can grow in the same garden. I urge you to vote no on SB 148 and allow the flowers to continue to grow in just one percent of Connecticut's rich soil.

I thank you for your time.